

# Islam growing—but not in America

By The Associated Press

Islam is re-awakening.

After tumultuous growth and decline, the 7th-century religion that commands 600 million to 800 million faithful is now asserting itself as a magnetic counterpoint to both Western capitalism and Eastern communism in the Islamic belt that stretches from Casablanca, Morocco, in West Africa to Jakarta, Indonesia, in the Pacific.

In black Africa, it is in rapid growth, judged free from the stigma of colonialism and gaining 10 converts to Christianity's one. In the largest and most varied congregation of human beings anywhere, the pilgrimage — "hajj" — to holy Mecca in Saudi Arabia drew 1.5 million pilgrims in 1978, growing 100,000 a year for the past two years.

And recently in Iran, Islam turned "revolutionary." An assortment of protesters rallying under its banner drove the King of Kings — Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi — from the 2,500-year-old Peacock Throne.

The expectation is that Islam's hold will grow in the aftermath of Iran's revolution. Already its influence is felt in most areas of the world.

Moslems — as followers of Islam are called — number more than 400 million in Asia, including between 30 million and 50 million in the Soviet Union, and the populous nations of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Saharan Africa, from Mauritania on the Atlantic coast to the Suez Canal, is solidly Moslem. As Islam marches south, its African adherents now are put over 100 million.

Between Afghanistan and Yemen, the population of 34 countries is more than 50 percent Moslem while Islam contains strong minorities in a score of nations from Cameroun in Africa to the Philippines in the Pacific. In addition, there are small communities in Argentina and Brazil.

Yet the influence of Islam in America has been limited mostly to Moslem immigrants and their descendants and to blacks, many of whose ancestors worshipped Allah in Africa.

Through its 1,400-year history, Islam has appealed chiefly to the enslaved and the downtrodden.

To most Americans, Islam is an exotic and mysterious religion. But it is becoming a political force in the world, too, one likely to influence events in America.

Around the world, one person in eight is a Moslem. Only one Moslem in every 2,000 lives in the United States. Roughly only one American in every 1,000 is a Moslem.

The Islamic Center of Washington claims Moslem explorers reached both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts before Columbus.

Legislation enacted by the South

Carolina House of Representatives in 1790 gave "sundry Moors, subjects of the Emperor of Morocco" the right to be tried in local courts. The minutes of other southern legislatures record debates over granting freedom of religion to "Catholics, Jews and Mohammedans."

But Islam found few converts among those already settled here. For the most part, American Moslems lived alone and apart.

By one authoritative estimate, Islam has only 250,000 adherents in the United States. The Mormons, whose faith is native to America, are 10 times more numerous.

Cedar Rapids became a Moslem center in a typical way. A few Lebanese Christian peddlers, seeking a new life on the frontier, opened shops there not long after the Civil War ended. Islamic Arab immigrants, seeking to live among those who knew their language, followed.

The first North American mosque was built in Cedar Rapids in 1934. It was a white clapboard building which looked like a country church — except for a crescent where a cross might have been.

Most Moslems settled in larger cities, chiefly Detroit and Dearborn, Mich.; Toledo, Ohio; Philadelphia; Baltimore; New York; and Los Angeles.

Moslem religious, educational and social institutions exist in 42 states and on many college campuses, where they serve students from the Middle East.

In the open atmosphere of America, some Moslems became more devout, reacting to the materialism and relaxed standards of sexual conduct, dress, drinking and morality they found. Others succumbed to the Western lifestyle and forgot their prayers. Some found a middle way.

In an interview, Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, director of Washington's Islamic Center, says he finds nothing incompatible between his religion and democracy, technology or modern ways.

"I send my children to American schools. I watch television. I fly in airplanes," he says. "One can go to the movies and be a good Moslem, but one could not go to the movies to watch naked girls and be a good Moslem. The few prohibitions about being a Moslem — the prohibition against eating pork, for example — are insignificant. One can be a good Moslem and a good American, and not eat pork."

Abdul-Rauf says the teachings of Mohammed have had a special appeal to black Americans because equality is a basic tenet of Islam and because the religion offers "certainty and a meaning of life to the individual."

Afro-American Moslems and Moslems with old world ties have not always agreed on how the teachings of Mohammed are to be followed, and



Followers of the Islamic faith sit as an Iman, or leader, reads from the Koran, Islam's sacred book, at the Islamic Mission of America, a

mosque established in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. (AP photo)

this led to tensions.

Most Moslems abhor the black supremacy doctrine preached by the Black Muslim movement of Elijah Muhammad as a heretical perversion.

Abdul-Rauf explains that Elijah proclaimed himself a prophet of God and "promoted hatred of whites. His creed, from our point of view, was false."

Not until Elijah died and his son directed the movement toward more traditional views were the Black Muslims welcomed as genuine adherents.

Islam has no structured clergy or single spokesman. To provide this country's Moslem institutions with guidance, the embassies of Moslem countries built the Islamic Center along Washington's embassy row.

It opened in 1957, supported with contributions from Moslem governments.

In 1977, it became a battlefield in a dispute between two splinter groups of black American Moslems — the

Black Muslims and the Hanafi Moslems.

Twelve Hanafi Moslems seized three Washington buildings — the Islamic Center; the headquarters of a Jewish service group, B'nai B'rith; and Washington's city hall — and held 149 hostages for 38 hours. The ambassadors of Egypt, Iran and

Pakistan finally persuaded them to end the seige. One person was killed.

Today, a visitor to the center finds a quiet place where he can learn something about Islam. The center offers lectures and publications on Islam's literature, philosophy and concepts.